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Minority Business Advocate Received National Recognition for Leaving No Small Business Behind

***Los Angeles School District's Small Business Manager by MBDA Honored at
24th National Minority Enterprise Development Week Awards Gala in
Washington, DC***

WASHINGTON—The Minority Business Development Agency's National Director Ronald N. Langston recognized Veronica Soto, Small Business Manager of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), as the 2006 National Minority Business Advocate of the Year award winner during the 24th National Minority Enterprise Development (MED) Week conference in Washington, D.C.

"I am pleased to honor Ms. Soto as the MBDA Minority Business Advocate of the Year award winner. She exemplifies a true advocate working for qualified, diverse business community that reflects the diverse communities of California and of the Nation," said National MBDA Director Ronald N. Langston. "She represents one of many business advocates in the public and private sectors who ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity in contributing to the economic growth of America."

"MBDA's recognition signifies extraordinary value and it reinforces the economic importance that minority-owned businesses have in our national economy as well as in the global markets," said Veronica Soto. "It's truly a remarkable and humbling experience to receive a national award for doing what I consider to be my daily passion—helping small, minority businesses become competitive and successful."

Managing the \$19.2 billion School Construction and Modernization Program, Ms. Soto joined the District in 2003 with 10 years of economic development program experience. At LAUSD, her charge is to achieve at least 25% participation of small business enterprises (SBE) to increase the pool of contractors, engineers, architects and other professionals to participate in the District's \$14.4 billion school construction program.

In its first year of implementation, the District awarded 39% of its total contract awards to SBE firms. In 2004, the District awarded \$307.4 million (60% of its total contract awards) to small businesses. Of that amount, 20% went to minority-owned businesses.

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To educate small businesses about LAUSD requirements, she developed an 8-week Boot Camp program covering bonding, certification, pre-qualification, access to capital, safety, public contract law, and labor compliance. The program has graduated more than 200 contractors who have been successful bidders on over \$20 million in contracts.

Ms. Soto has developed a procurement process and outreach strategy that includes significant participation of small, minority and women-owned firms for Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority and the Democratic National Convention. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California's School of Administration.

Soto was one of 9 national minority business award winners recognized at this year's 24th Annual National MED Week Awards Gala held on September 1st at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. Actor/producer Tim Reid, best known in "*WKRP in Cincinnati*" and his actress wife, Daphne, best known as "Vivian" in the hit show "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" with Will Smith emceed the event. Award winners, their guests and over 1000 conference attendees also enjoyed musical selections by the Morgan State University Choir and the Pan American Symphony Orchestra.

MED Week, established by Presidential Proclamation each year since 1983, recognizes the role that minority entrepreneurs play in building the American economy through the creation of jobs, products and services, in addition to supporting their local communities. The National MED Week Conference is MBDA's signature event for the minority business enterprise community including the private, non-profit and government sectors. The conference promotes and celebrates the vital role minority businesses play in generating wealth, creating jobs and strengthening our nation's economy. It also serves as a forum to discuss the issues, trends and strategies affecting minority-owned business enterprises. This year's theme, *Minority Business Enterprises: Mastering the Supply Chain*, emphasizes how new market realities require minority businesses to strategically position their businesses in domestic and global supply chains.

Conference speakers include U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez, U.S. Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao, SBA Administrator Steven Preston, GSA Administrator Lurita Doan, and Dr. Matthew Slaughter of the President's Council of Economic Advisors. Premium sponsors of the 2006 Conference include BAE Systems, IBM, Chevron, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon company, VISA, FedEx and GVCwinstar. With over 1,000 attendees, the National MED Week features a White House breakfast series, networking events, industry-driven workshops, State of Commerce luncheon, business expo, and an awards gala.

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About the Minority Business Development Agency, US Department of Commerce

Founded in 1971 and headquartered in Washington, DC, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. MBDA is the only federal agency created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses in this Nation. The Agency actively promotes the growth and competitiveness of large, medium and small minority business enterprises by offering management and technical assistance through a network of forty local business centers throughout the United States. Statistics on minority businesses and resources to build and sustain minority businesses are available at www.mbd.gov.

